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SUBJECT: NEW CONVERGENCE PROJECT CONTINUES U.S.-INDIA PARTNERSHIP TO
ERADICATE CHILD LABOR

11. SUMMARY: The U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL)-funded project, "Converging Against Child Labor: Support for India's Model," provides new momentum for the partnership between the U.S. and India in eradicating child labor. Implemented by the International Labor Organization (ILO), the USD 6.85 million convergence project builds on the previously successful USD 40 million U.S.-India INDUS Child Labor Project. The successor project explicitly aims at child labor trafficking and seeks to leverage the benefits of existing GOI welfare schemes at the grassroots level. A pre-launch stakeholder workshop in Bhopal attended by Poloffs provided insights into the strong level of commitment by state government officials. The Government of India (GOI) and ILO plan to formally launch the project in early 2010. The project demonstrates the value of seeking partnerships with the GOI to help it overcome India's societal problems. END SUMMARY.

CONVERGENCE MODEL TAKES UP AFTER INDUS

12. The U.S. Department of Labor (USDOL) is providing USD 6.85 million in funding for a child labor project in India. The project, "Converging Against Child Labor: Support for India's Model," builds on the tremendous success of the USD 40 million joint USG-GOI Indus Child Labor Project that ended in March 2009, after rescuing over 100,000 child laborers. The selected sites for the project are: Bihar (Sithamari and Katiyar), Gujarat (Vadodara and Surat), Jharkhand (Ranchi and Sahibganj), Madhya Pradesh (Jabalpur and Ujjain), and Orissa (Cuttack and Kalahandi). The International Labor Organization (ILO) will implement the new project, which seeks to prevent and eliminate hazardous child labor, including the trafficking and migration of children for labor. The project will demonstrate a sustainable convergence model at the grassroots level that leverages the benefits of various GOI social welfare programs (tapping into millions of dollars of additional funds). The goal is to tackle child labor more effectively by supporting economic rehabilitation of families in tandem with educational rehabilitation of children. The project targets over 48,000 current and potential child laborers between the ages of 5 and 17.

13. The ILO began preliminary project work by convening state-level stakeholder workshops in Patna, Bihar and Bhopal, Madhya Pradesh in December, and will hold similar meetings in Gujarat, Orissa, and Jharkhand in early 2010. The GOI and ILO expect to formally launch the project in February or March 2010. Embassy Poloffs attended the stakeholder workshop in Bhopal on December 21-22, 2009, which comprised approximately 60 attendees. Participants included representatives from various state agencies, unions, and NGOs in addition to experts from colleges. The participation of senior state officials was a demonstration of the Madhya Pradesh state

government's strong commitment to the project and to eradicating child labor. State Labor Minister Jagannath Singh inaugurated the workshop, while Labor Secretary Sewaram and Labor Commissioner Pramod Kumar Das participated in the entire two-day workshop. Several participants recalled the tremendous success of the INDUS project and expressed hoped that the new project would achieve similar gains. Some participants asked the ILO and state government officials to ensure that the project had sufficient consultation with and support from the community at the grassroots level.

TRAFFICKED AND MIGRANT CHILD LABOR

¶4. A principal objective of the project is the prevention of trafficking and migration of children for labor. This is the first time a child labor project has explicitly recognized the problem of trafficking of children for labor, and demonstrates recognition by the GOI and Indian states of this issue. During the workshop, state officials admitted that migration of children, especially during the agricultural season, was a problem and that the Madhya Pradesh wanted to learn ways to better handle it. In closing remarks, Labor Commissioner Das stressed that the project would be very useful in helping Madhya Pradesh further tackle child labor, and Labor Secretary Sewaram exhorted participants to actively participate to derive the project's full benefits.

COMMENT: PARTNERING WITH INDIA WORKS

¶5. The GOI's continuing focus on child labor is significant since

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children form the most vulnerable segment of bonded and forced laborers in India. State governments' active participation in addressing the problem is crucial in India's federal system. The GOI sees the convergence project as an important building block to further advance its goal of eliminating child labor. The project's holistic approach and focus on leveraging various GOI welfare programs at the grassroots level have not been attempted in the past. If successful, the GOI plans to expand the model to other districts that suffer from child labor. The convergence project not only continues the U.S.-India partnership against child labor but demonstrates the value in seeking to partner with the GOI to help India overcome its societal problems.

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